

Community Toolkit

- Business Support for Youth Programs
- Creating an Education Program and Hiring Youth Outreach Staff
 - Creating Youth Recognition Awards/Scholarships
 - Developing a Youth Training/Leadership Program
 - Involving Young People in the Election Process
 - Mentoring Students and Visiting Schools
 - Setting up Internship Programs
- Working with Youth to Address Specific Community Issues or Needs
 - Youth Philanthropy
- **Youth on School, Municipal, and Advisory Boards / Councils**

**The Maine Department of Education's
Citizenship Education Task Force**

and

CAMPAIGN FOR THE CIVIC MISSION OF SCHOOLS



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Giving young people the opportunity to serve on boards and/or councils is a key step in encouraging them to become more engaged in their communities. In a recent survey of 105 school districts by KIDS Consortium, almost 25% reported having youth members on their school boards.¹ Although a survey of municipalities has not been conducted, several communities have created youth advisory councils. Through participation on boards young people learn the processes by which a community or school is governed and begin to understand the impact they can have on local public policy decisions. They also develop leadership, communication, problem-solving, and teamwork skills through hands-on experiences and build confidence in themselves, while providing new perspectives to adult community members. Communities gain new ideas for addressing local problems and needs, and learn about issues important to young people.

Youth on School Boards

There are a growing number of school districts in Maine that permit young people to act as liaisons between their schools and locally elected school boards. Although the Maine State Charter does not permit student votes to be counted, school districts have created a variety of approaches that allow student representatives to attend board meetings and add their voice to discussions and decision-making processes. CSD 10, which serves the towns of Manchester, Readfield, Mount Vernon, and Wayne, has had student representatives from Maranacook Community High School on the school board for more than ten years and in the last four has started sending one middle school representative as well.

The elected students are current members of the student senate. They give a brief speech about why they want the position, and then student senate members elect representatives during their first meeting of the school year. Students serve a one-year term and can be elected to multiple terms by running each year.

Students attend and give a student report at each board meeting. They take notes at each meeting and report back to the school senate. The student reports are also published and are available to the community.

Although students are not permitted to vote, they have nonetheless been effective advocates for the issues and opinions of their peers and have had a real impact on school board decisions. For example,

- In the fall of 2002 the district was considering accepting a grant that would place a school resource officer (SRO) on the Maranacook campus. According to Pat Stanton, dean of students at Maranacook Community High School, students discussed this issue at length, brought it to the attention of the student senate, and in turn, the student school board representatives brought it to the attention of the school board. The student school board representatives worked with the other student senate members, who brought in feedback collected during the homeroom period, to make their case as to why an SRO should not be brought to the campus. Because of the overwhelming number of students who

¹ For more information on the KIDS Consortium survey visit
http://www.mecitizenshiped.org/youth/student_representation.html

expressed that having an armed SRO on campus would make being on campus an uncomfortable experience, the grant was declined 15 to 1 by the school board.

- During the 2004-05 school year, after the unexpected number of declared snow days in CSD10, the student representatives worked with the school board to determine how students could make up the lost time without pushing back graduation. Through extensive meetings and deliberation, the students and board agreed that if each student were to contribute 20 hours of community service before the end of the school year, they would not extend the academic year. This led to school-wide community service projects planned by the student senate and faculty to ensure each student could achieve the required goal of 20 hours of service.

While it may be easy to disregard the voice of young people because of voting regulations, it is apparent that they have a desire to express their opinions about what is taking place in their communities and want to participate in events that will affect their lives. Districts, like CSD10, are making great efforts to educate their young people about civic engagement through real life experiences. According to Pat Stanton, “kids need to practice democracy in school if we expect them to be able to be educated participants as adults.”

Youth on Non-Profit Boards: Youthlinks Youth Advisory Board

Youthlinks is a non-profit that provides service learning programs for youth ages 11-17 in the midcoast region of Maine. Their programs give youth opportunities to learn skills, build self-esteem, develop leadership ability, cultivate responsibility and connect to their peers, adults, and communities. The story of their Youth Advisory Board is one which demonstrates that even a youth-friendly organization can run into obstacles. There is a cautionary note, with the message that if the first try does not work, stop, evaluate and try again.

Executive Director, Carole Martin, explains that the first Youth Advisory Board was made up of teens who helped formulate policy and give input on program ideas, but they were not required to participate in Youthlink programs. The result was that the Youth Advisory Board and the Youthlinks program participants rarely interacted with one another. On the one hand, the community saw the youth advisory board as exemplifying youth involvement in Youthlinks programs, while the Youthlink program participants viewed the board as elitist. Since the youth board members were not part of the programs, they did not learn true peer leadership skills, had no solid examples of program strengths / weaknesses, and operated from a theoretical platform. The lesson learned from Youthlinks is to set a clear expectation of student board representatives. Youthlinks Executive Director, Carole Martin advises:

“While active involvement is often a criterion for initial consideration to school or municipal board membership, it should be an ongoing one. While this may seem obvious, failing to clearly state this expectation may result in diminished community involvement by youth board members who continue to have a voice on the board. This reduces the overall credibility of student board involvement, and of decisions made by a board that may be influenced by youth no longer perceived by their peers to be active in the organization/community/activity.”

The Youth Advisory Board had to be disbanded, and an ad hoc group was temporarily set up. New, realistic guidelines, such as requiring active program involvement, were outlined for the new Youth Advisory Board. Since then, Youthlinks has made plans to reintroduce the Youth Advisory Board for the summer of 2006.

Youth on Non-Profit Boards: Maine Rural Partners

Maine Rural Partners (MRP), a non-profit organization dedicated to advancing collaborative, integrated approaches to rural development, understands that youth are the future of Maine and need to play a part in helping to shape it. Although their board membership did not specifically provide for “youth,” Maine Rural Partners agreed that they must be included in all conversations about rural Maine’s economic future and community life. Maine Rural Partners’ first youth member was added to the board in 2005. Not long after, in 2006, two young adults were added as key organizational staff members. Through these additions, Maine Rural Partners has been able to develop a working relationship with youth groups across the state. Organizations like Realize!Maine, League of Young Voters and others are currently collaborating in MRP’s *Harness the Wealth!* training, a capacity building program for Maine rural communities to be able to identify, mobilize and sustain strategic community resources for rural revitalization. With youth engagement as one of the four key areas of *Harness the Wealth!*, Maine Rural Partners is setting an example for what they hope to encourage across rural Maine communities.

Youth on Non-Profit Boards: Midcoast Magnet

Midcoast Magnet formed in 2004 by a group of young professionals who work and live in Maine’s midcoast region. Since then, the group has become a non-profit economic development team with the mission of attracting, retaining, and connecting innovative and entrepreneurial people and companies to the midcoast. Midcoast Magnet comprises a group of young professionals, so they already pass the “youth involvement” inspection with flying colors. They have the powerful advantage of understanding the need to mobilize and actively engage young adults in their community. However, as Midcoast “Maggers” mature, a time will come when even their members will no longer be considered “youth” or “young adults.” To ensure the continued involvement and perspective of young adults, Midcoast Magnet is currently constructing the bylaws of their advisory board membership in which they plan to call for the direct involvement of youth and young adults.

Portland Youth Advisory Council

The Portland Youth Advisory Council, comprised of 14 students from Portland area schools, came into existence in September 2000 as a result of a survey conducted the year before. The Portland Asset Builders found that of the 3,000 Portland youth surveyed, an overwhelming majority of them did not feel valued by the community and felt that they were not given useful roles in the community. Afterward, community conversations were held in which youth and adults contributed several recommendations. Creating a city youth council topped the list.

Since then, the Portland Youth Advisory Council has worked closely with the City Council on numerous community projects while providing a positive youth voice on issues and concerns which relate to them. Some of their growing accomplishments include:

- Successful advocacy of \$500,000 in Capital Improvement Funds for a new Homeless Teen Center;
- Testifying on the city budget on regarding youth priorities;
- Negotiating an agreement with the City Traffic Engineer and neighborhood to expand school parking options during the school day;
- Participating in United Way Day of Caring;
- Meeting with City representatives; and
- Participating in Public Relation opportunities (Superintendent's Access Channel TV program; meeting with Portland Press Herald; and presentation at Communities for Children Conference).

Current 2005-2006 involvements and projects include: attendance of the National League of Cities Conference in Washington, D.C.; providing input about the relocation of the skateboard park; participation in meetings and hearings of the City Council's Finance Committee; and the feasibility of creating a website to involve and connect with more youth.

Lewiston Youth Advisory Council

Maine's communities are becoming more aware of the power held by their young people and are making the effort to include them in more engaging ways. The Lewiston Youth Advisory Council (LYAC) is an advisory council to the Lewiston City Council in regards to community issues affecting youth. The council also enables youth to work towards goals that empower all of the community's youth and to undertake service projects that enhance the community.

The idea to create a youth council was brought to the community by former Lewiston Mayor, Kaileigh A. Tara, with a goal of encouraging youth involvement. After discussion at a community forum and presentation before the Lewiston City Council, it was determined that a youth council should be formed.

Established in October of 2001, the Council's membership may include up to 15 ninth-grade through twelfth-grade students; two co-advisors, Maggie Chisholm and Dottie Perham-Whittier; a Lewiston City Council member, currently Norm Rousseau; and others who help the council organize and support the community projects it plans. There are four officers of the council: chair, vice-chair, secretary, and treasurer, all having specific duties outlined in the group's extensive by-laws. The mayor, city administrator, and assistant city administrator also interact with the council.

Members are required to participate in an application and interview process in order to be appointed to the council. Dottie Perham-Whittier notes, "Following discussion at an initial community forum, we went with an application process versus election so that anyone could apply and selection wouldn't be based on popularity." After their one-year term on the council, the members have the opportunity to reapply to serve another term.

Each year the council holds an orientation session for its members, both new and returning, to educate members about municipal government and also to update them as to what's currently occurring at the city level. The orientation also incorporates teamwork activities designed to help

members understand their own strengths and how they can positively impact what goes on around them.

During the academic year, according to the council's bylaws, the council meets a minimum of once a month (in actuality it tends to meet twice a month at City Hall). There is no regular day and time due to changing extracurricular schedules throughout the year. In between meetings, council members are in regular contact with their advisors through e-mail and phone. The Council also makes a monthly presentation to the Lewiston City Council.

The Lewiston Youth Advisory Council receives \$300 a year from the city of Lewiston. Despite limited funding, the group has organized and participated in a number of outstanding community awareness and recognition campaigns and projects since its first meeting in 2002:

- The group raised more than \$25,000 for the multi-level sitting of an 1891 historic clock at City Hall, one of only a few historic timepieces on display in New England.
- It participates in the mayor's Citation of Excellence, whereby the council and the mayor of Lewiston choose a middle or high school student each month who has done something extraordinary. Together, LYAC representatives and the mayor present the citation in the award recipient's classroom.
- The group is currently taking the lead on nominating the city of Lewiston for a 2006 "All-America City Award" and will be visiting Worcester, Massachusetts, in the near future to talk to their application contacts (Worcester is a five-time winner).
- It led an "Is Your Number Up" campaign in partnership with the Lewiston fire department to encourage businesses and homeowners to properly place their location numbers for prompt emergency responding.
- In early 2003 the council completed a noise pollution awareness campaign in which it held community forums and reached out to the younger members for the community by holding a poster-making contest for elementary level students. It also ran an on-line community Web survey and developed a noise-awareness comic book for children.
- Currently, the council is raising money to create two electronic community message boards (at both entrances of the high school), which will provide school, community, and LYAC information.

LYAC also works closely with Senator Peggy Rotundo on legislative issues that are relevant to youth interests. Members of the group have advocated for local control of electronic message board signs (which passed), and they sent a proposal to the state on the driving age for teens when it was up for debate.

These activities are just a few examples of what the council has accomplished in the last three years and are only the beginning of an ever-growing list of accomplishments. "The group has indeed done a wonderful job, and they've developed a positive reputation within the community," says Dottie Perham-Whittier. Through their various projects, members of the council have developed experience in planning community service projects, community relations techniques, and a greater knowledge of how municipal governments work.

Belfast Youth Council

After attending the October 2005 “More Reasons for Hope” Conference hosted by Communities for Children and Youth, Patrick Walsh and Jim Bell of Belfast were inspired to create a youth council for their city. Following the conference, Patrick Walsh appealed to the Mayor and City Manager of Belfast about developing a youth advisory council. They were supportive and in December of 2005 the Belfast Youth Council was formed.

The Belfast Youth Council provides Belfast youth an opportunity to participate in municipal government as an advisory body, and to also utilize their creativity towards community enhancement. Its formal mission reads, “The Belfast Youth Council’s mission is to create a working partnership among the youth of Belfast and the city government, to ensure a better sense of community, responsibility and service.” Membership consists of twelve students with three alternates. Before becoming a Council member, students complete an application, go before a screening committee, are interviewed by the City Council and then appointed to their post.

Communities for Children and Youth: Advisory Council

Communities for Children and Youth is a statewide initiative of the Maine Children's Cabinet that is designed to create a partnership between state government and local communities to promote positive child and youth development. Since 1997, 71 communities have joined the network, representing more than 325 municipalities and 70% of the state's population. Communities for Children brings together the resources of state government with the leadership, organization and concern of local communities to solve problems facing Maine’s children and families.

Their Advisory Council is composed of community leaders and representatives, as well as youth. The partner community representatives bring youths to regular Advisory Council meetings. The nine youth representatives add valuable input in such areas as planning conferences and in helping to implement initiatives. Youths on the Advisory Council are not strangers to councils. The young adults are active in their own community, serving on their local Communities for Children and Youth Leadership Councils, various community groups, and in student government.

Maine Legislative Youth Advisory Council

The Maine Legislative Youth Advisory Council (MLYAC) was established in 2002 as a permanent advisory council to the Legislature. It was the first youth council in the nation to have an advisory relationship with legislators and the statutory authority to submit legislation. Membership consists of four legislators and eighteen youth members (of high school and college age). The Council is directed to advise the Legislature on proposed and pending legislation, state budget expenditures and policy matters related to youth; to advise the legislative joint standing committees and study commissions, committees and task forces on issues related to youth; and conduct periodic seminars on leadership, government and the Legislature. The Maine Legislative Youth Advisory Council is also required to report annually to the Legislature and can submit legislation to implement its recommendations.

Since 2002 the Council has served the interest of Maine youth and played an important role in addressing the following issues: education, youth employment, Maine youth in foster care,

alcohol and substance abuse, and issues related to minority youth in the state. Legislative Analyst and Council staff member, Phil McCarthy sums up the Council's vital role, "Youth have a way to speak truth to power."

Youth on Municipal / City Councils: Waterville

It is no accident that Colby College student and Legislative Youth Advisory Council member, Henry Beck is also a City Councilor for Waterville. Henry grew up in Waterville, and first became active in the Greater Waterville Communities for Children. Since then, his public involvement has taken off. To say that he has a deep passion for community service and civic engagement would be an understatement.

Henry is an example of what can happen when public interest and personal drive combine in a young adult. He makes involvement seem easy, but Henry knows the challenges in encouraging other youth to be engaged. In January of 2006 Henry took office as a Waterville City Councilor. Shortly thereafter he began work on a community engagement project with Waterville residents. Monthly meetings were held on community issues such as public safety, youth opportunities, education, etc. Henry faced some skepticism from residents, but that did not stop him. He worked hard in talking to each young person to encourage them to attend the meetings. As he asserts, "the messenger must match the message," and his word and his work did exactly that. Getting the Waterville youth to participate and open up was successful, but there are some key points to remember. Henry notes that adult support (parents, teachers, civic leaders, mentors, etc.) is crucial to youth involvement: "You have to give young people the confidence to participate." Ideally, Henry would like to see civic standards and make civic involvement a criteria to receive a high school diploma. Until then, he adds that incentives like free food can also be a big help in getting young people engaged.

Ideas and Suggestions for Implementation

Become an advocate for youth on your local school board, municipal board or non-profit board.
A key step in getting youth involved with school and municipal boards is voicing the need for it. Whether as a school board or city council member, student or active community member, make the idea heard. As seen in the case studies, formation of youth boards can start with one person's idea and blossom. As an adult, go to the city council or school board. As a student, go to the student senate/council and recommend that the idea of starting a youth board should be brought to the attention of the community.

Make sure the community is involved in the decision.
In both CSD10 and Lewiston, community members were included in deciding how representatives would be chosen, what kind of activities and events they would be involved in and at what level they would be permitted to participate.

Involve young people in the process.
The goal of getting youth on board is to encourage them to be active community members, so it is most important to remember to include them in the planning process. Have school assemblies or homeroom presentations to gather student opinions and ideas.

Consider your options.
After initial discussions with the school board, city council, or student senate, gather information on how other youth boards got started. Begin by researching some of the communities that have existing youth councils and/or student school board representatives. This can provide valuable contact information and a framework for how to start a new program. Think about the circumstances in your community or school and look at ways to create a program that will meet your needs. Important factors to consider include:

- How will student representatives be selected?
- How long will their term last?
- What will they be required to do? For students serving on existing boards, will they be expected to do everything that is required of adult members? For stand-alone youth advisory boards, who will set their agenda? How will decisions be made about controversial ideas or projects?
- How will the youth representatives communicate with other youth in the school or community?

Case Study Resources

Rich Abramson, Superintendent, 207-685-3336

Pat Stanton, Dean of Students, 207-685-4923

Maranacook Community School

45 Millard Harrison Drive

Readfield, Maine 04355

207-685-336

http://169.244.33.66/~union_42/

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<http://www.ci.lewiston.me.us/lyac/>

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<http://www.maine.gov/legis/opla/legyouth.htm>

Henry Beck

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http://www.waterville-me.gov/city_council.htm

Additional Resources

At the Table

AttheTable.org is designed to provide resources and information about how to involve young people in decision-making. <http://www.atthetable.org/default.asp>

Communities and Schools Promoting Health

This page lists web-based documents that examine how educators can work with elected or appointed student representatives on school councils or as student representatives on school boards. General documents on having youth representatives on governing boards are also listed.

http://www.safehealthyschools.org/youth/student_representatives.htm

The Freechild Project

Freechild connects young people to create social change. They offer resources, programs, training, and more.

<http://www.freechild.org/actions.htm>

Local Government

Contact your local town government, and get information about all other counties and municipalities in Maine.

<http://www.maine.gov/local/>

Michigan Community Foundations Youth Project

Check out their best practice #10, which says that the Michigan law allows for youth age 16 and older to serve as voting members on non-profit boards. http://www.mcfyp.org/BestPractices_10.html

National Youth Rights Association

This link offers an article on a Colorado student group and their push for more student representatives on school boards. <http://forums.youthrights.org/showthread.php?t=1388>

SoundOut

This link offers a multi-topic resource guide for promoting Student Voice, Participation, Engagement, Involvement, and Representation on Local, District, Regional, and State Boards of Education. The guide includes research, examples, and other resources for students, educators, administrators, and community members.

<http://www.soundout.org/Guide.106.html>

Youth Action Net

Youth Voice: A Guide for Engaging Young People in Leadership and Decision-Making in Service-Learning Programs provides an overview on the importance of youth voice in service-learning and includes an extensive resource section. Go to page 27 of the report for information on how youth can participate in governance and on boards. <http://www.youthactionnet.org/resources/index.cfm?rsid=963>

Youth On Board

Youth on Board prepares youth to be leaders and decision makers in their communities and strengthens relationships between youth and adults through publications, customized workshops, and technical assistance.

<http://www.youthonboard.org>